

Hearing or seeing a play?: Evidence of early modern theatrical terminology

Going to a play in Shakespeare's England was obviously an aural and a visual experience, but Hamlet's announcement "we'll hear a play" (2.2.538) instead of "we'll see a play" (as we might put it) has aided those who think that the aural experience was primary. John Orrell claimed that the Globe playhouse was "an acoustical auditorium, intended to serve the word and the ear more fully than the image and the eye" and listed acoustic highlights from Shakespeare's plays:

Lear's rage and Cleopatra's immortal longings, the old mole in the cellarge, or the music of the god Hercules leaving Antony: can anybody doubt that it was the sound of these things rather than the sight of them that mattered first? (Orrell 1983, 140)

These are important moments for sound, but Orrell did not claim they were anything more than special occasions of aural pleasure. Bruce R. Smith's view is more broad: "The South Bank amphitheatres were, in fact, instruments for producing, shaping, and propagating sound. Evidence that theaters were thought about as sound-devices is not hard to come by" and "The 1599 Globe was an instrument to be played upon, and the key element in that instrument was wood" (Smith 1999, 206, 208). Smith described playgoers as listeners, and Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa noted that

The term 'audience' itself, taken from the Latin 'audire', to hear, indicates the expectation that plays are things to be heard rather than seen. In Shakespeare's time the alternative word, 'spectator', from the Latin 'spectare', to see or watch, became a late intrusion which never succeeded in capturing the concept of what a playgoer truly was. (Gurr & Ichikawa 2000, 8)

In his wider study of playgoing, Gurr offered a qualitative view of the references to "hearing" and "seeing" and commented that the actors' skills of movement (including swordplay and dancing), their expensive costumes, and the use of fireworks and 'discoveries',

all assumed that the eye was a stronger sense than the ear. So the spectator should have replaced the auditor with ease. But if we make such assumptions we ignore not only the survival of 'audience' as the standard word but the vastly greater readiness of Elizabethans to use their ears for all forms of learning. . . . Both the collective 'audience' and the singular 'auditor' enjoyed a much longer currency in English than 'spectator', and in Shakespeare's time the competition was on fairly even terms. (Gurr 1996, 90)

Gurr traced depictions of, and allusions to, the tension between theatre as spectacle and theatre as audition in writings of the period and related it to the social and intellectual stratification of the industry. From 1600, Gurr argued, playwrights chose their terminology to distinguish the desirable playgoer (an auditor) from the undesirable (a spectator) (Gurr 1996, 86-98). To Ben Jonson Gurr attributed the theory of art which held poetry above spectacle and called the Articles in the Induction to Jonson's Bartholomew Fair "The central text of all this dispute"¹.

My brief quotations of Orrell, Smith, Gurr, and Ichikawa do no justice to the subtle complexity of the works from which they are extracted, but they form a rough

consensus. To the discriminating playwrights hearing was more important than seeing, although the economic reality of having to please a playgoing public of varying tastes meant that "the competition was on fairly even terms", as Gurr put it. Now that the entire body of pre-twentieth century English literature is available online in one searchable electronic corpus--the Literature Online (LION) database sold by the Chadwyck-Healey company--it is possible to take a quantitative approach to the terminology used by writers of poetry, drama, and prose literature. Specifically, we can now with ease answer the question "did they say 'hear a play' or 'see a play'?" It must be remembered that the noun play has meanings other than dramatic performance: "Exercise, brisk or free movement or action" (OED play n. 1-5), "Exercise or action for amusement or diversion" (OED play n. 6-13), and "Performance on a musical instrument" (OED play n. 16-17). Where the word play has these meanings we must of course exclude it from the evidence for the reception of drama.

The Literature Online database is a superset of Chadwyck-Healey's CD-ROM products which aimed to supply the full texts of all English drama, poetry, and fiction up to 1900, together with a search engine for finding the texts by their contents.² The most impressive feature of the disks was the ability to find all the works containing a particular word or string of words. The online version of this database is delivered via the Internet and has two distinct advantages over the standalone disks: the primary data resides on and is interrogated by Chadwyck-Healey's servers (which are speedier than personal computers) and the entire body of material can be interrogated with a single search (the standalone disks were divided by genre and each had to be searched separately).

To restrict the searching to the early modern period, I instructed the LION database to consider only works whose writers' lives overlapped the period 1550 to 1650. Given a maximum lifespan of, say, 80 years (well above the period's average) this criterion includes writers born as early as 1470 and writers who died as late as 1730, but for a typical lifespan 1500 and 1700 would be the approximate limits. Within these limits I searched for occurrences of the verbs "to see" and "to hear" in connection with plays. It would be desirable but difficult to allow for all the possible syntactic arrangements of these verbs and the noun play, so I limited my attention to 3-word strings of verb-article-noun. The verb could be in the infinitive form (see, hear) or one of the simple tenses (present: see, sees, hear, hears; past: saw, heard; future and future in the past likewise), or one of the continuous tenses (all forms: seeing, hearing), or one of the perfect tenses (all forms: seen, heard), and the article could be indefinite or definite (for example, see a play or see the play). Finally, the noun could be singular or plural where the definite article is used (for example, hear the play or hear the plays).

When searching amongst thousands of literary texts from this period spelling variation must be taken into account. The OED lists variant spellings by date and for our period the relevant possibilities (excluding manuscript-only forms using the archaic letter yog) for see are:

see (infinitive) se, sene, seen, sie, seyne, sea, zee

see (1st person singular present simple) se, sie

see (2nd person singular present simple) seyst, seest, seis, seysis

sees (3rd person singular present simple) sethe, seeth, seis, sies
see (1st, 2nd, and 3rd person plural present simple) se, sie, seis, sen
saw (1st and 3rd person singular past simple) sawe, sauhe, sawhe, sawgh, sauch, save, saue, sa, sae, saa, saye, sey, se, see, sye
saw (2nd person singular past simple) seest, sawyste, sawiste, seyst, saw'st, sawst, sawest
saw (1st, 2nd, and 3rd person plural past simple) seen, seene, saue, sawe, se, see, sy
seeing (present participle used to make continuous tenses) seand, seyng, seynghe, seeynghe, seing, seying, seeinge
seen (past participle used to make perfect tenses) sene, seyn, seyne, seene, seine, seane, senne, see'd

Since for our purposes it does not matter which tense is used in the literature we can remove duplicates in the above list to arrive at these variants:³

see se, sene, sie, seyne, sea, zee, seyst, seest, seis, seyis, sen
sees sethe, seeth, seis, sies
saw sawe, sauhe, sawhe, sawgh, sauch, save, saue, sa, sae, saa, saye, sey, sye, seest, sawyste, sawiste, seyst, saw'st, sawst, sawest, sy
seeing seand, seyng, seynghe, seeynghe, seing, seying, seeinge
seen seyn, seyne, seene, seine, seane, senne, see'd

For hear the OED listing of variant spellings is less complete, giving no variants for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular and plural present simple forms (other than harst, a fifteenth-century 2nd person singular form) and no present participle used to make continuous tenses. We may assume that the 1st and 2nd person singular and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person plural present simple forms could vary like the infinitive and the 3rd person singular present simple form could vary like the infinitive plus -s, and that the present participle could vary like the infinitive plus -ing, or -yng, or -inge, or -ynge. These assumptions give this table of possible variant spellings:

hear (infinitive) here, heare, her, hyre, heire, heir
hear (1st, and 2nd person singular and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person plural present simple) here, heare, her, hyre, heire, heir
hears (3 person singular present simple) heres, heares, hers, hyres, heires, heirs
heard (1st, 2nd, 3rd person singular and plural past simple) herde, herd, hearde, harde, hard
hearing (present participle used to make continuous tenses) hereing, heareing, hering, hyreing, heireing, heiring; hearyng, hereyng, heareyng, heryng, hyreyng, heireyng, heiryng; hearinge, hereinge, heareinge, heringe, hyreinge, heireinge, heiringe; hearynge, hereynge, heareynge, herynge, hyreynghe, heireynge, heirynghe
heard (past participle used to make perfect tenses) herd, harde, hard

Again we can remove duplicates in the above list to arrive at these variants:

hear here, heare, her, hyre, heire, heir
hears heres, heares, hers, hyres, heires, heirs
heard herde, herd, hearde, harde, hard
hearing hereing, heareing, hering, hyreing, heireing, heiring; hearyng, hereyng,

heareyng, heryng, hyreyng, heireyng, heiryng; hearinge, hereinge, heareinge, heringe, hyreinge, heireinge, heiringe; hearynge, hereynge, heareynge, herynge, hyreynge, heireynge, heiryng

Finally, we must take account of the variant spellings of play and plays:

play play, playe, plaie, plawe
plays plays, playes, plais, lawes

In the summary table and lists below I identify each verb-article-noun string using modern spelling of the verbs see and hear and the noun play but in every case I also searched for each of the variants listed above and included the results in the lists.⁴ The possible combinations of so many spelling variants would require over 1000 searches if performed iteratively, but certain shortcuts remove whole sets of combinations at a stroke. The discovery that the string "a plawe" occurs nowhere in the the period eliminates entirely the individual searches "see a plawe", "sees a plawe", "saw a plawe", etcetera, as well as the same strings with the variant spellings of see, sees, and saw. More usefully still, the LION search engine software allows the wildcard character * (asterisk) to stand for any string of characters, so that the negative result for the search "se the pl*" eliminates the need to search for "se the play", "se the playe", "se the playe", "se the plaie", "se the plawe" and their plural forms "se the plays", "se the plays", etcetera.

The table and lists below show the results of the searching. The primary conclusion is that plays were much more commonly thought of as visual rather than aural experiences in the literary and dramatic writing of the period. Nearly half (3/8) of the rare aural examples are by Shakespeare and we may guess that his pre-eminence in the field is the reason that Shakespeare's unusual way of putting it has, wrongly, been taken for the period's norm. The total number of example expressions found is high (over 100) and the preponderance of visual over aural phrasing is more than 12 to 1. Within that pattern I can detect no significant changes over time: neither expression is markedly more or less prevalent at either end of the period. In deciding whether the word play is being used in the sense of dramatic performance (as opposed to other kinds of spectacle) I have excluded only clear examples of the non-dramatic meanings. The total weight of evidence is so strong that even if the most sceptical view were taken--all but the unequivocally dramatic cases being excluded--the primary conclusion of this study would stand.

Appendices

Table 1. Summary of occurrences. Percentages total horizontally (thus see a play + hear a play = 100%) and are rounded to nearest percentage point.

see a play 54 hits (List A) 92%	hear a play 5 hits (List B) 8%
sees a play 2 hits (List C) 100%	hears a play 0 hit
saw a play 5 hits (List D) 83%	heard a play (past simple tense) 1 hit (List E) 17%
seeing a play 6 hits (List F) 100%	hearing a play 0 hits
seen a play 4 hits (List G) 100%	heard a play (present perfect tense) 0 hits
see the play[s] 17 hits (List H) 89%	hear the play[s] 2 hits (List I) 11%

sees the play[s] 0 hits
 saw the play[s] 1 hit (List J) 100%
 seeing the play[s] 1 hit (List K) 100%
 seen the play[s] 7 hits (List L) 100%
 Total 97 hits (92%)

hears the play[s] 0 hits
 heard the plays[s] (past simple tense) 0 hits
 hearing the play[s] 0 hits
 heard the play[s] (present perfect tense) 0 hits
 Total 8 hits (8%)

Lists of Hits in Context⁵

List A. Occurrences of "see a play", total 54 hits

Poetry

1. Armin, Robert "Who's the Foole now?" from Quips upon Questions (1600)
 Poem section "Thus it fell out, as he him selfe did say, / He to the Curtaine went, to see a Play" (lines 17-18)
2. Buckler, Edward "Profitable and pious thoughts of Death" from Midnights Meditations of Death (1646), Part 2 "Of Deaths impartiality", Section 3
 "Pleasures cannot protect us from the stroke of Death", Meditation 1: "They ask'd him if he pleas'd to take the air, / Or call for's coach and ride to see a play. / And whether he would hunt the buck or hare, / Or to a tavern go to drive away" (lines 173-176)
3. Jordan, Thomas "A Prologue to introduce the first Woman that came to Act on the Stage in the Tragedy, call'd The Moor of Venice" from A Nursery of Novelties (1665?): "And when we've put all things in this fair way / Barebones himself may come to see a Play" (lines 37-38)
4. Nash, Thomas "The Choosing of Valentines" from The Choise of Valentines (1899): "Or see a playe of strange moralitie, / Shewen by Bachelrie of Maningtree" (lines 11-12)
5. Peacham, Henry "Vpon Sir Acolastus. Epigram 72" from Thalia's Banquet (1620): "Hodge art awake, what shall we do to day, / To cardes, go drinke, or else go see a play?" (lines 1-2)
6. Rowlands, Samuel "Epigram. Pra'y by your leaue, make mousieur humors roome" from Humors Looking Glasse (1608): "Pra'y by your leaue, make mousieur humors roome / That oft hath walk'd about Duke Humphries tombe / And sat amongst the Knights to see a play, / And gone in's suite of Sattin eu'ry day" (lines 1-4)
7. ----- "A swearing Knaue" from The Knave of Harts (1612) "To dinner next, and then (in stead of grace) / He sweares his stomacke is in hungry case. / No sooner din'd, but cals, Come, take away, / And sweares, tis late, he must goe see a Play" (lines 11-14)
8. ----- "Epigram 7. Speake Gentlemen, what shall we do to day?" from The Letting of Humours Blood in the Head-vaine (1600): "Or shall we to the Globe and see a Play? / Or visit Shorditch for a bawdie house?" (lines 3-4)
9. Shirley, James "To M. Phil. Massenger on his Renegado" from Poems (1646): "Or nicer men / That through a perspective will see a play, / And use it the wrong way" (lines 7-9)

10. Taylor, John, "Epigram 39. Out of the pan into the fire" from All the Workes (1630): "When for one two pence (if his humor please) / He might go see a play, and scape all these" (lines 5-6)
11. ----- "Epigram 22. Great Captaine Sharke doth wonderfully muse" from All the Workes (1630): "And for he scornes to see a Play past twice: / Hee'l spend a time with his sweet Cockatrice" (lines 7-8)
12. Tofte, Robert "The Thirde Part of the Moneths Mind of a Melancholy Lover" from Alba (1598): "Loves labor lost, I once did see a Play, / Ycleped so, so called to my paine" (lines 481-82)
13. Weever, John "Epigram 9. In Eripham vetulam" from Epigrammes (1599): "Eripha that old trot euery day / Wafts o're the water for to see a play" (lines 1-2)

Drama

14. Anonymous Love Feigned and Unfeigned (1911-56): "FALSEHOOD God save ye my m^{rs} god save ye this blessed day / why stare ye at me thus I wene ye be come to se a play" (lines 64-65)
15. Anonymous The Costlie Whore (1633): "Al. Ile call the Actors, will you see a play?" (Act 2, line 2)
16. Beaumont, Francis The Woman-Hater (1679): "Count. I'll after dinner to the Stage, to see a Play; where, when I first enter, you shall have a murmur in the house" (1.3.68)
17. Behn, Aphra, 1640-1689 The Second Part of The Rover (1681): "And tho my Lady seldom see a Play, / She, with her Eldest Daughter, shall be boxt that day" (Epilogue, lines 25-26)
18. Belchier, Dabridgcourt See Me, and See Me Not (1618): "Pasq. A riuer foole, didst neuer see a play" (line 605)
19. Brome, Richard The Sparagvs Garden (1640): "Reb. nor am I so unreasonable but I can stay the time: in the meane time I long to see a play, and above all playes, The Knight of the burning---what dee' call't" (2.2.51-53)
20. Buckingham, Duke of (George Villiers), Samuel Butler, Thomas Sprat, and Martin Clifford The Rehearsal (1672): "Johns. Why, as I use to do; eat and drink as well as I can, have a She-friend to be private with in the afternoon, and sometimes see a Play" (1.1.25-27)
21. Chamberlain, Robert The Swaggering Damsel (1640): "Sir P. Nay, I'me indifferent, my masters walke the fields, / Goe by Water, see a Play, or what ye will, tis / All one to me, come what say you sonne,---speake?" (Act 1, lines 284-86)
22. Cooke, John Greenes Tu Quoque (1614): "Rash. Why you couragious Boyes, and worthy Wenches, made out of Waxe. But what shall's doe when wee haue dinde, shall's goe see a Play?" (lines 1502-4)
23. Crown, John Sir Courtly Nice (1685): "Vio. She must not go abroad or see a play" (Act 4, line 45)
24. D'Avenant, William The Play-house to be Let (1673): "Play. They'l get money; none now but very choice / Spectators will vouchsafe to see a Play / Without 'm" (Act 1, lines 190-93)
25. Day, John The Ile of Guls (1606): "Enter seuerally 3. Gentlemen, as to see a play" (Opening stage direction)

26. Dryden, John Secret Love (1668): "Your Fancy's pall'd, and liberally you pay / To have it quicken'd, e're you see a Play" (Second Prologue, lines 21-22)
27. ----- Sr Martin Mar-all (1668): "Rose. My Mistress, knowing Sir John was to be abroad upon business this Afternoon, has asked leave to see a Play: and Sir John has so great a confidence of your Master, that he will trust no body with her, but him." (Act 3, lines 13-16)
28. Field, Nathan Amends for Ladies (1618): "Welt. It may be shee's stolne out to see a play." (Act 2, line 416)
29. ----- Amends for Ladies (1618): "Draw. I haue beene at Besse Turnups, and she swears all the Gentlewomen went to see a Play at the Fortune" (Act 3, lines 92-94)
30. Fletcher, John and Francis Beaumont The Scornful Ladie (1616): "El. lo. I can eate Mutton now, and feast my selfe with my two shillings, and can see a Play for eighteene pence againe" (Act 4, lines 199-200)
31. H. B. (Henry Burnell) Landgartha (1641): "Rad. Now and then to see a Play, when we want / Other exercise; and once a weeke (upon / A holy day, when all doores are shut up) / To a godly exhortation, and sleepe out (At least) three parts on't" (Act 3, lines 73-77)
32. Jonson, Ben Poetaster (1616): "Tvcc. I would faine come with my cockatrice one day, and see a play; if I knew when there were a good bawdie one" (3.4.162-164)
33. ----- The Staple of Newes (1640): "For your owne sakes, not his, he bad me say, / Would you were come to heare, not see a Play" (Prologue, lines 1-2)⁶
34. Killigrew, Thomas Chit-chat (1719): "Flo. I'll be bound to Live in the Countrey all my Life time, if by his Consent he'll permit Poor Women to see a Play" (Act 4, lines 371-73)
35. ----- The Parsons Wedding (1664): "Wid. Niece, now if we could be rid of these troublesome Lovers too, we would go see a Play" (3.1.13-14)
36. ----- The Parsons Wedding (1664): "Carel. Will you go see a Play?" (3.2.71)
37. Marbury, Francis The Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom (1971): "IDLENESS A sirra my masters how fare you at this blessed day / what I wen all this company are come to se a play" (1.2.1-2)
38. Marston, John Histrion-mastix (1610): "Four. Fayth lets goe see a Play" (Act 1, line 172)
39. ----- Histrion-mastix (1610): "Vel. See a Play, a proper pastime indeed: to heere a deale of prating to so little purpose" (Act 1, lines 173-74)
40. ----- Histrion-mastix (1610): "Gulch. Come to the Towne-house and see a Play" (Act 2, line 81)
41. ----- Histrion-mastix (1610): "Stew. My Lord hath sent request to see a play" (Act 3, line 217)
42. Middleton, Thomas The Mayor of Quinborough (1661): "Sym. Nay now proud Rebel, I will make thee stay, / And to thy greater torment see a Play" (5.1.176-77)
43. Mountfort, Walter The Launching of the Mary (1933): "do:- Am I suspected for incontinent / because sometymes to recreate my selfe I see a playe" (2.1.77-79)
44. Nabbes, Thomas Covent Garden (1638): "Ralph. I hope so: we shall then be neere the Cock-pit, and see a Play now and then" (1.1.42-43)
45. Newcastle, Duchess of (Margaret Cavendish) The Apocriphal Ladies (1662): "1 Gent. Why Faith it is as good a sight as to see a Play" (Scene 15, line 15)

46. Settle, Elkanah Ibrahim (1677): "Leave you at Cribbage, let you see a Play, / Or take the Ayre in a fair Summers day (Epilogue, lines 20-21)
47. Shadwell, Thomas The Sullen Lovers (1668): "Emili. 'I tell you, I had as live stand among the rabble, to see a Jack-pudding eate a Custard, as trouble my self to see a Play" (Act 2, lines 398-400)
48. ----- A True Widow (1679): "Theod. I must never have you see a Play but when I am there" (Act 3, lines 568)
49. Strobe, William The Floating Island (1655): "Whether you come to see a Play or hear, / Whether your censure sit in th' Eye or Eare" (Prologue To the University, lines 17-18)⁷
50. Wycherley, William The Country Wife (1675): "Mr. Pin. 'Tis just done, she comes from it; but why are you so eager to see a Play?" (Act 3, lines 61-62)
51. ----- The Gentleman Dancing-master (1673): "Pru. 'Tis true, Miss, two poor young Creatures as we are! / Hipp. Not suffer'd to see a play in a twelve-month!" (Act 1, lines 7-8)

Prose

52. Anonymous Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie (1590): "yet at last, as the longest Sommers day hath his night, so this dumpe had an ende: and forsooth vpon whitson monday last I would needes to the Theatre to see a play" (Prologue, sig. B1r)
53. Head, Richard and Francis Kirkman The English Rogue, Part 2 (1668): "for the next day we again going to see a Play, it happened, that it was the Siege of Rhodes, and then he was as much taken with Roxolana, as he had formerly been with Arethusa, and highly commended that part: I perceiving his fancy, told him, that I supposed he would be very glad to imbrace Roxolana in his Armes" (Chapter 36, sig. Z4v)
54. Kirkman, Francis The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled (1673): "therefore three or four dayes after her arrival there, she invites the Watchmaker, who was a Batchelour, and her Landlady to go see a Play at the Dukes Theatre" (sig. K2v)

List B. Occurrences of "hear a play", total 5 hits

Poetry: No hits

Drama

1. Anonymous The Marriage-broker (1662): "Goodw. You may command these winged posts to flie / With greater speed, or slowly for to wait / Your will; but if you please, we'll hear a Play" (3.1.162-64)
2. Newcastle, Duke of (William Cavendish) The Humorous Lovers (1677): "Emil. I hate the repetition of the same sad story, I had rather hear a Play in Rime thrice over" (1.2.35-36)
3. Payne, Henry Neville The Fatal Jealousie (1673): "We silence wish that Men might hear a Play, / And wish that Vizard Mask would keep away" (Epilogue, lines 32-33)

4. Shakespeare, William Hamlet (1623): "Ham. Follow him Friends: wee'l heare a play to morrow" (Act 2, line 543)
5. ----- The Taming of the Shrew (1623): "Mes. Therefore they thought it good you heare a play, / And frame your minde to mirth and merriment" (Act 1, lines 271-72)

Prose: No hits

List C. Occurrences of "sees a play", total 2 hits

Poetry

1. Davies, John "In Fuscum" from The Works (1869): "He goes to Gyls, where he doth eate till one; / Then sees a Play till sixe; and sups at seven" (lines 6-7)

Drama

2. Behn, Aphra, 1640-1689 The Rover, Part 1 (1677): "With th'Insolence of Common-Wealths you rule, / Where each gay Fop, and Politick grave Fool / On Monarch Wit impose, without controul. / As for the last, who seldom sees a Play, / Unless it be the old Black Fryers way, / Shaking his empty Noddle o're Bamboo, / He Crys,---Good Faith, these Playes will never do" (Epilogue, lines 16-22)

Prose: No hits

List D. Occurrences of "saw a play", total 5 hits

Poetry: No hits

Drama

1. Brome, Richard The Antipodes (1640): "Dia. I never saw a play. / Doct. Lady you shall" (1.6.231-32)
2. ----- The Antipodes (1640): "Dia. Besides sir I am well; and have a minde / (A thankfull one) to taste my Lords free bounty. / I never saw a play, and would be loath / To lose my longing now" (2.3.42-45)
3. Shadwell, Thomas A True Widow (1679): "Prig. A Pox on't, Madam! what should we do at this damn'd Play-house? Let's send for some Cards, and play at Lang-triloo in the Box: Pox on 'em! I ne'r saw a Play had any thing in't; some of 'em have Wit now and then, but what care I for Wit" (Act 4, lines 43-46)
4. Shirley, James The Ball (1639): "Fr. Here I observ'd many remarkeable buildings, as the / Vniversitie, which some call the Loure, where the Students made very much of me, and carried me / To the Beare-garden, where I saw a play on the / Banke-side, a very pretty Comedy call'd Martheme, / In London"

(Act 4, lines 57-62)

Prose

5. Head, Richard and Francis Kirkman The English Rogue, Part 2 (1668): "This his vayne of Poetry was not only pleasant to me, but profitable; and he fell into one of the finest humors that I have heard of; for I attending him to the Play-houses very frequently, we one day saw a Play called Philaster or love lyes a bleeding" (Chapter 36, sig. Z4r)
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List E. Occurrences of "heard a play (past simple tense)", total 1 hit

Poetry: No hits

Drama

1. Shakespeare, William The Taming of the Shrew (1623): "Lord. There is a Lord will heare you play to night; / But I am doubtfull of your modesties, / Least (ouer-eyng of his odde behauour, / For yet his honor neuer heard a play) / You breake into some merrie passion" (Act 1, lines 95-99)

Prose: No hits

List F. Occurrences of "seeing a play", total 6 hits

Poetry: No hits

Drama

1. Chamberlain, Robert The Swaggering Damsel (1640): "Val. when I go by water, then the waves that tumble one in the others necke, present to my fancy the multiplicity of distraction crowding in at the doore of my thoughts, and for seeing a Play, I confesse it a brave thing, both to feast the wit, and recreate the minde: but, I thinke I shall ere be long see my selfe act my owne Tragedie" (1.1.291-96)
2. Crown, John The English Frier (1690): "To these they made such an agreeable entertainment, and others they so deafned, that none could attend to the Players. On the contrary, the Audience was become Actors, and the Actors an Audience; seeing a Play begun in the Pit, the Actors were bound in good manners to let their Parts fall , and give way to their betters" (Preface to the Reader)
3. Jonson, Ben Poetaster (1616): "Albi. At your ladships seruice, I got that speech by seeing a play last day, and it did me some grace now: I see, 'tis good to collect sometimes; I'll frequent these plaies more then I haue done, now I come to be familiar with courtiers" (2.2.84-87)

4. Killigrew, Thomas, Chit-chat (1719): "Bell. You wrong me Madam, I've no Objection to their seeing a Play, but going to be seen at a Play is levelling themselves with Players, a thing wou'd grieve me in the Woman I valued (4.1.374-77)

Prose

5. Head, Richard and Francis Kirkman The English Rogue, Part 2 (1668): "I am the more particular in my relation, of my acquaintance with him: and the means of our closing, by seeing a Play, because of the advantages I gained on him afterwards, by the same occasion" (Chapter 36, sig. Z4v)
 6. Nash, Thomas Pierce Penilesse (1592): "For whereas the after-noone being the eldest time of the day; wherein men that are their owne masters, (as Gentlemen of the Court, the Innes of the Court, and the number of Captaines and Souldiours about London) doo wholly bestow themselues vpon pleasure, and that pleasure they deuide (how vertuously it skills not) either into gameing, following of harlots, drinking, or seeing a Play: is it / not then better (since of foure extreames all the world cannot keepe them but they will choose one) that they should betake them to the least, which is Playes?" (sig. H1v-H2r)
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List G. Occurrences of "seen a play", total 4 hits

Poetry: No hits

Drama

1. Buckingham, Duke of (George Villiers), Samuel Butler, Thomas Sprat, and Martin Clifford The Rehearsal (1672): "Johns. I, but it won't do so long: by that time thou hast seen a Play or two, that I'll shew thee, thou wilt be pretty well acquainted with this new kind of Foppery" (2.1.86-88)
2. D'Avenant, William The Play-house to be Let (1673): "Play. Stop 'em! they're like to hear, if they will stay / An Epilogue, since they have seen a Play" (Act 5, lines 215-16)

Prose

3. Anonymous Pasquils lestes (1609): "But after that they had gone abroad with the hostesse, to see sights, Cheapeside, the Exchange, Westminster, and London bridge, had trode the top of Powles, vnder their feet, beene at Beare garden, seene a play, and had made a tauerne banquet, looking into their purses for to discharge their expences, were willing to see this strange sight of these Gardens, which she had daily promised to bring them to, but still making excuse, that they were in the countrey, and not yet come to London againe, that had such gardens to be seene" ("The Eight Gull, Upon the Gardens", sig. F4r)
4. Head, Richard and Francis Kirkman The English Rogue, Part 4 (1671): "A Countrey Gentleman being there present, and having never seen a Play, but this Acted once before, and seeing them fight again in the same manner, as

they had done before, steps hastily down stairs, and bringing up a Bottle of Wine in his hand, interposes between them" (Chapter 11, section "A Soldier of Fortune", sig. N8v-O1r)

List H. Occurrences of "see the play" and "see the plays", total 17 hits

Poetry

1. Dryden, John The Sixth Satire of Juvenal from The Works (1882-92): "The poor Ogulnia, on the poet's day, / Will borrow clothes and chair to see the play (lines 469-70)
2. Heywood, Jasper The First Tragedie of Seneca Entituled Hercules Furens from Hercules Furens, Thyestes, Troas (1581): "CHORUS As great a preasse as flocke in cyties streetes, / To see the Playes of Theatre newe wrought" (Act 3, lines 247-48)

Drama

3. Brome, Richard The Antipodes (1640): "Mar. Indeed I am weary, and would faine goe home. / Bar. Indeed but you must stay, and see the play" (2.5.33-34)
4. Buckingham, Duke of (George Villiers), Samuel Butler, Thomas Sprat, and Martin Clifford The Rehearsal (1672): "Bayes. For if I could engage 'em to clap, before they see the Play, you know 'twould be so much the better; because then they were engag'd (1.1.248-50)
5. Chapman, George May-day (1611): "Inno. Did you see the play to day I pray? / Lio. No, but I see the foole in it here" (5.2.130-31)
6. Crown, John The Countrey Wit (1675): "but as it happened, I had the diversion to see the Play stand, and them choakt with the dust they made about it: if they wou'd have done me the favour to have taken me into their society, I wou'd have joyn'd with them in damning a great part of it" (Dedication)
7. Dryden, John Don Sebastian (1690): "Pray ease me of my wonder if you may / Is all this Crowd barely to see the play, / Or is't the Poets Execution day?" (Prologue by "unknown hand" printed as back matter, lines 4-6)
8. ----- Marriage a la Mode (1673): "Thus have my Spouse and I inform'd the Nation, / And led you all the way to Reformation. / Not with dull Morals, gravely writ, like those, / Which men of easie Phlegme, with care compose. / Your Poet's of stiff words, and limber sense, / Born on the confines of indifference. / But by examples drawn, I dare to say, / From most of you, who hear, and see the Play" (Epilogue, lines 1-8)
9. Fletcher, John and Nathan Field Four Playes or Morall Representations in One (1647): "Rin. Nor for any thing, deer Don, but that you would place me conveniently to see the Play to night" (lines 45-46)
10. Gomersall, Robert Lodowick Sforza (1628): "Asc. He went (such was his vse) to see the play" (3.5.26)
11. Killigrew, Thomas The Parsons Wedding (1664): "Jolly. I perceive by this you will not see the Play; what think you of going to Sims, to Bowles, till I come?" (3.2.105-6)

12. Marston, John Histrio-mastix (1610): "Enter Mauortius, Philarchus, with Landulpho (an Italian Lord) and other Nobles and Gentles to see the Play." (Act 2, lines 223.1-2, stage direction)
13. Massinger, Philip The Roman Actor (1629): "Domit. You are wanton? / Pray you forbear. Let me see the Play" (2.1.326-27)
14. Newcastle, Duchess of (Margaret Cavendish) The Convent of Pleasure (1668): "Enter a Lady, asking whether they will see the Play" (3.1.26.1, stage direction)
15. Settle, Elkanah Cambyses (1671): "Nay, you have found a most compendious way / Of Damning, now, before you see the Play" (Epilogue, lines 19-20)
16. ----- The Empress of Morocco (1673): "To see the Play should be your only Ends, / Wee'le then presume you are the Authors Friends" (Prologue "at the playhouse", lines 21-22)
17. Shakespeare, William The Winters Tale (1623): "Perd. I see the Play so lyes, / That I must beare a part" (4.4.731-32)

Prose: No hits

List I. Occurrences of "hear the play" and "hear the plays", total 2 hits

Poetry

1. Dryden, John "Epilogue to the King and Queene Upon the Union of the Two Companies in 1686" from The Works (1882-92) Volume 10: "We beg you, Sirs, to beg your men, that they / Would please to give you leave to hear the play" (lines 27-28)

Drama

2. Payne, Henry Neville The Fatal Jealousie (1673): "For sitting there h'has seen the lesser gang / Of Callow Criticks down their heads to hang; / Lending long Ears to all that you should say, / So understand, yet never hear the Play: / Then in the Tavern swear their time they've lost, / And Curse the Poet put e'm to that cost" (Prologue, lines 14-19)

Prose: No hits

List J. Occurrences of "saw the play" and "saw the plays", total 1 hit

Poetry: No hits

Drama: No hits

Prose

1. Kirkman, Francis The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled (1673): "I do not remember that ever I saw the Play, but I think the Epilogue spoken by her self at last was thus, 'I have past one Trial, but it is my fear / I shall receive a Rigid Sentence here'" (sig F2r)
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List K. Occurrences of "seeing the play" and "seeing the plays", total 1 hit

Poetry: No hits

Drama: No hits

Prose

1. Behn, Aphra The Fair Jilt (1688): "But one Night, above the rest, upon a Sunday, when he knew she wou'd be at the Theatre; for she never miss'd that Day, seeing the Play; he waited at the Corner of the Statt-house, near the Theatre, with his Cloak cast over his Face, and a black Periwigg, all alone, with his Pistol ready cock'd; and remain'd not very long, but he saw her Kinsman's Coach come along." (sig. G7r-G7v)
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List L. Occurrences of "seen the play" and "seen the plays", total 7 hits

Poetry: No hits

Drama:

1. Betterton, Thomas The Counterfeit Bridegroom (1677): "Nay, your ill natures bare so great a sway, / Often ye Damn, befor you've seen the Play" (Epilogue, lines 8-9)
2. Brome, Richard The English Moor (1659): "But whether I avail, you have seen the play, / And all that in defence the Poet can say / Is, that he cannot mend it by a jest / I'th Epilogue exceeding all the rest" (Epilogue, lines 15-18)
3. Daborne, Robert A Christian Turn'd Turke (1612): "Rab. And you would be rid of me, I conceiue you sir, though I am no polititian: I haue seene the play of Pedringano sir, of Pedringano sir" (Act 5, lines 145-47)
4. ----- A Christian Turn'd Turke (1612): "Iew. Haue I caught you? are you in the noose? you haue seene the play of Pedringano sir, Il'e play with you" (Act 5, lines 173-74)
5. Wilson, John The Cheats (1664): "And therefore upon the whole matter, whoever may have seen the Play, or shall happen to read this, I have but two things more to begge of him" ("The author, to the reader, 16 November 1663")

Prose

6. Newcastle, Duchess of (Margaret Cavendish) The Description of a New World (1666): "The Emperess remembred that she had seen the Play, and asked the Spirits whom he meant by the name of Ananias?" (Part 1, sig. S1v)
7. ----- The Description of a New World (1666): "Then the Emperess desired to enter into the Theatre, and when she had seen the Play that was acted, the Duchess asked her how she liked that Recreation?" (Part 1, sig. Ee1v)

Notes

¹Gurr 1996, 96. Despite the tenor of the Induction, Jonson made a fine visual pun with a stage booth; see Egan 1998.

²'Literature' is, of course, a difficult category to define. For this study the important Chadwyck-Healey products which are incorporated into LION are the CD-ROMs "English Verse Drama", "English Prose Drama", "English Poetry", and "Early English Prose Fiction". For each but the last of these, the CD-ROM (from which LION's holdings derive) contained all the works in that genre listed in the New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1969-72). For "Early English Prose Fiction" Chadwyck-Healey took the advice of a team led by Holger Klein (University of Salzburg), David Margolies (Goldsmiths' College London), and Janet Todd (University of East Anglia). The publicity material for the "Early English Prose Fiction" disk described its contents thus:

The aim has been to provide representative chronological coverage of the period. Selection of texts was guided by the principle of inclusiveness rather than by narrow--and endlessly debatable--concepts of the novel form. . . . Excluded are non-fictional prose, translations (with the exception of Argenis from Barclay's Latin) and medieval 'survivals': works written before the period in question but printed within it. (Quoted from Dan Burnstone (Publisher, Literature, Chadwyck-Healey), email to the author, 11 May 2000)

The resulting compilation of over 200 prose fiction texts from 1500 to 1700 is about the same size (in total words) as the drama and poetry products.

³Where one of the inflexional forms has an unrelated homograph the tense does matter inasmuch as it helps identify the potential false hit. Examples of unrelated homographic false hits are save, a variant spelling of saw, which has the homograph save meaning 'to rescue or protect' (thus "save the play" meaning rescue it), and here, a variant spelling of hear, which has the homograph here meaning 'in this place' (thus "here the play begins" meaning 'at this place the play begins'). Similarly the definite article has the homograph the, a variant spelling of the pronoun thee, which occurs in "to see the play the knave" meaning 'to perceive you behaving like a knave'. All such homographic false hits have been excluded from the evidence in this study.

⁴In the event hardly any of the variant spellings were found in the literature of the period, presumably because the printing industry promoted regular spelling.

⁵Dates in brackets are years of printing. I have expanded some abbreviations and for each hit I have extended the context to provide an intelligible sense unit. Where a dramatic speech prefix is not given in the printed text but is clear from the context I have added it to the quoted speech in uppercase letters and modern spelling.

⁶If we were looking more generally for evidence about hearing plays (that is, when the syntax was other than verb-article-noun") this would count once for "see" and once for "hear".

⁷Again, by other syntactic criteria this would count once for "see" and once for "hear".

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